United Nations

Press Release

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General expresses surprise and deep concern over recent developments in Soviet Union.

- Officials from UNHCR and International Organization for Migration appeal to international community for economic assistance to Albania.

- Anti-Apartheid Committee Chairman welcomes agreement on South African exiles and refugees.

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Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar has expressed surprise and deep concern over recent developments in the Soviet Union. However, he said, it was too early to say how the future of that country would be affected.

The Secretary-General made his comments to the press in Portugal early this morning where he is taking a rest from his diplomatic efforts with regard to the hostage situation.

A United Nations spokesman said in a statement today that the Secretary-General had expressed the profound hope that violence and civil strife would be avoided, and that the events would not bring harm to the Soviet people, nor derail the democratization process in Eastern Europe. In this connection, he said, Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar stressed the importance that the Soviet Union respect all its international obligations.

The spokesman went on saying that, while observing that developments in the Soviet Union were essentially internal matters, the Secretary-General had noted "the strong and most remarkable support" that the United Nations and he personally had received from President Gorbachev over the past years -- a support that had helped this Organization immensely and had led to the hope that the Charter's vision of the world could be realized.

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For information media—not an official record

Officials of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) today made an urgent appeal to the international community for economic assistance to the Albanian people.

A United Nations press officer reporting from Geneva said Sergio Vieira de Mello of the UNHCR, and Rolf Jenny of the IOM made the appeal upon their return from a three-day mission in Tirana. The two officials went to Albania in the wake of the recent exodus of some 20,000 Albanians fleeing to Italy and Malta.

At a press conference in Geneva they said massive foreign investment rather than humanitarian assistance was needed to avert the threat of social anarchy in the country. Their contacts with a wide spectrum of Albanian Government and opposition leaders convinced them that the Albanians were not political refugees and could return without fear of persecution. The reason for the tragic flight of Albanians was economic, Mr. Vieira de Mello said. The Albanian agriculture had returned to primitive levels, causing its economy to be in a state of "catastrophe". New economic laws had passed through Parliament; more were to come, but they could only be implemented if initial capital inputs were available, he said.

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The Special Committee against Apartheid has welcomed the agreement reached on Friday, 16 August, between the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the South African authorities regarding the voluntary repatriation of South African refugees and political exiles.

In a statement today, Committee Chairman Ibrahim Gambari (Nigeria) expressed satisfaction that returnees granted immunity would be "allowed to peacefully return to South Africa without risk or arrest, detention, imprisonment or legal proceedings whether civil or criminal in respect of any political offence".

He expressed hope that the final agreement as well as the strict implementation of the Accord would further promote peaceful conditions and free political activity which were required for the future negotiations.

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